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Salis Daiches – Towards a Portrait of a Scottish Rabbi

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Bio

Hannah Holtschneider is Senior Lecturer in Jewish Studies at the University of Edinburgh. Her doctoral thesis was published as *German Protestants remember the Holocaust: Theology and the construction of collective memory* (Lit. Verlag, Münster, 2001). In 2011 she published her second monograph *The Holocaust and representations of Jews: History and identity in the museum* (Routledge, London). She has published widely on Jewish/non-Jewish relations, has co-founded the online resource <http://jnjr.div.ed.ac.uk/>, and co-edits the journal *Holocaust Studies: A Journal of Culture and History*. Currently, she is writing an introduction to the study of Jews and Judaism for Routledge and, with Dr Mia Spiro, works on a large AHRC-funded research project on Jewish life in Scotland: *Jewish Lives, Scottish Spaces: Jewish Migration to Scotland, 1880-1950*.

Abstract 100 words

This article sketches the outlines of an intellectual biography of Rabbi Dr Salis Daiches (1880-1945) who served the Edinburgh Hebrew Congregation from 1919 until his death. It seeks to establish his education and career path to understand his relationship to the religious leadership of the United Synagogue. It also considers the foundations of his model of a synthesis of traditional religious education and practice with an equivalent secular education and full participation in wider society. The article is a pilot of a larger research project on the religious and cultural history of Scotland's Jews from the late nineteenth to the middle of the twentieth century.

Keywords 5-8

Jews, Scotland, Daiches, religious history, orthodoxy, Enlightenment

Introduction

The longest serving Edinburgh rabbi, Dr Salis Daiches from Vilna, has not received much scholarly attention. Indeed, the history of Scottish Jewry to date largely remains a lacuna in research on British Jewish history.¹ Todd Endelman, as late as 2002, argued that Anglo-Jewish history² is determined by the Jewish populations of London, Manchester, Leeds, Liverpool, Glasgow and Birmingham, as these are numerically strongest and ‘What happened elsewhere, however piquant and arresting in human terms, reveals little about the main currents of Anglo-Jewish history.’³ However, since then a number of regional studies have been published, notably Tony Kushner’s *Anglo-Jewry since 1066: Place, Memory and Locality*,⁴ drawing attention to the significance of the regions in accounts of British-Jewish history. Thus, the increasing attention to histories of ‘ordinary’ Jews has opened the door to focused regional inquiries.⁵ Yet, Anglo-Jewish history is often conceived as social, economic and political history, religious developments being sidelined due to the lack of an impressive British-Jewish scholarly tradition in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.⁶ Nonetheless, scholars are now also engaging in intellectual portraits of significant figures in Jewish history in Britain, so that a new wave of scholarship revises aspects of British-Jewish history.⁷ This article, then, is a modest contribution to these efforts, seeking to engage for the first time in an intellectual biography of, arguably, Scotland’s most significant rabbi in the twentieth century: Rabbi Dr Salis Daiches, rabbi of the Edinburgh Hebrew Congregation from 1919 until his death in May 1945.

This article focuses on Daiches’ articulation of his religious ideology, gleaned from his education and career path and his volume of programmatic essays *Aspects of Judaism*.⁸ It seeks to elucidate his approach to his position as a rabbi in Edinburgh and to interpret this as a significant aspect of his leadership ambitions following from his education and rabbinical ordination. Sources for this first exploration are Daiches’ papers, left to the National Library of Scotland, his published essays *Aspects of Judaism*, and an assortment of newspaper articles in the Jewish and non-Jewish press, as well as David Daiches’ recollections of his father in *Two Worlds* (originally published in 1956), particularly the chapter added in the 1997 edition, ‘Promised Lands: A Portrait of my Father’.⁹ This paper does not focus on Daiches’

contribution to public debate in Scotland, his Zionist engagement or his struggle with the Jewish missions and interfaith work. It only briefly comments on his practical work in the Jewish community. The primary focus of this paper are the intellectual and religious foundations motivating Daiches' engagement in the Jewish and wider community and his relationship with the Chief Rabbi and his *Beth Din*.¹⁰

A great deal of archival material concerns invitations to dinners and programmes of events of Jewish and non-Jewish societies across the UK where Salis Daiches was invited to lecture. At these events he was respected as an authority on Jewish law (*halakhah*) and philosophy within the Jewish community, and as someone who can authoritatively represent the Jewish community to non-Jews. While he seemed to write a great deal, and kept up a number of significant professional correspondences, his 'output' is focused on oral delivery of his thoughts in the form of speeches, sermons, and invited lectures. His only book-length publication, *Aspects of Judaism* (1928), was not complemented by a, much hoped for, sequel. This preliminary understanding of Salis Daiches tallies well with the portrait of a father provided by David Daiches. David Daiches' *Two Worlds* has long been treated as a significant source of information about the illustrious 'Chief Rabbi of Edinburgh'. There is much to recommend the son's recollections of his father and nuclear family. David Daiches offers a sensitive and insightful portrayal of a father who sometimes appeared distant and a difficult man to know, not least for his children. And it is attractive to rely on this first-hand testimony in the absence of other materials which allow a more intimate understanding of the kind of man Rabbi Dr Salis Daiches was. The archive testifies to a man in demand in many different professional and public contexts, to a life of service and duty fuelled by a sense of his own ability, significance and ambition.¹¹ Daiches is probably best characterised as an orator, thriving on his ability to respond eloquently, with depth and powerful reasoning, to all manner of occasions to which he was invited to speak.¹² But David Daiches is not only his father's son, he is also writing his own memories of a childhood in Edinburgh. As such, *Two Worlds*, including 'Promised Lands', is a work of memory beset by all the usual interpretive challenges when using personal memoir as a historical source text.¹³ Thus, this article foregrounds the documentary evidence available about Salis Daiches' education and religious ideology to sketch the outlines of his self-understanding and career ambitions. David Daiches' memories of his father are used mainly to corroborate and illustrate the archival records.

This article first discusses Salis Daiches' educational and professional path, focusing on his

rabbinical and secular studies and his migration to the UK. Then his religious ideology fusing orthodox¹⁴ practice with life in a secular society and its dissemination to Jewish and non-Jewish audiences comes into focus, beginning an evaluation of his position in and contribution to the religious leadership of the Jewish community in the UK in the first decades of the twentieth century. A significant part of the wider project is research on the regional religious leadership of Jews in Scotland and their relationship to the London *Beth Din*. Rabbis born in the UK and abroad, their biographies and relationships to the Chief Rabbi's office, the London *Beth Din* and the United Synagogue, are still a blind spot in the research landscape of British Jewish history. Thus, the article tentatively also raises wider questions about the relationship between provincial religious leaders and the United Synagogue and its *Beth Din*. How were the lines of communication and power established across the regions? What positions across the UK are occupied by highly educated immigrant rabbis and how did they relate to the Chief Rabbi's Office? This article, while focusing on the biography and ideology of Salis Daiches, is one small foray into this gap.

Biography

Born in 1880 in Vilna, Bezalel (Sally, later: Salis) Daiches was homeschooled by his father and a teacher hired to introduce him to the secular world.¹⁵ He then attended the Royal Grammar School in Königsberg and proceeded to read philosophy at Königsberg University. In 1887 he moved to Berlin to enrol in the *Rabbiner-Seminar* founded by Rabbi Esriel Hildesheimer, while also matriculating at the University of Berlin. Daiches completed his philosophical studies in Germany in 1903 with a PhD from the University of Leipzig on Hume's practical philosophy. The same year he emigrated to the UK to join his parents and siblings in Leeds before taking up pulpits in Hull, Hammersmith and Sunderland, moving to Edinburgh in 1919.¹⁶ Daiches arrived in the UK at a crucial time of Jewish immigration and heightened tension between Eastern European migrants and the established Anglo-Jewish community.¹⁷ His religious outlook, I argue, made him attractive to both sides of the divide. The Anglo-Jewish religious and social establishment could perceive him as a bridge between new immigrants and the anglicised community due to his Litvak roots and traditional education and his German modern-orthodox training. The immigrant community could relate to his willingness to meet them on their own turf, addressing congregations in Yiddish and 'translating' their religious needs into the Anglo-Jewish vernacular while trying to persuade them of the benefits of acculturation which can be enjoyed without ceasing to be orthodox.¹⁸

Training at the Berliner *Rabbiner-Seminar* was developed in response to the changing social situation of Jews in Western Europe and combined aspects of a *yeshiva* curriculum with the secular study of the Humanities. While the traditional *yeshiva* equipped Jewish men to interpret Jewish law (*halakhah*) and navigate through the vast legal and narrative literature of the Talmud and its commentaries, it did not aspire to make its graduates into community rabbis with a host of other, pastoral, responsibilities and the task of representing the Jewish community to the non-Jewish majority society. Instead, learning and traditional scholarship could be perceived and pursued as ends in themselves, fulfilling the commandment of *talmud torah* (religious learning) for its own sake, incumbent on all Jewish men.¹⁹ The challenges of modernity and emancipation which paved the way for the integration of Jews in the public life of mainstream society in all European states also brought about a process of transformation of the rabbinate. From the middle of the 19th century new institutions for the education of Jewish clergy developed across Western and Central Europe. These responded to the demands for community leaders trained in religious as well as secular subjects, corresponding to the changed expectations of Jewish congregations, mainstream society and secular authorities. For the education of orthodox rabbis and preachers, the seminary founded by Rabbi Esriel Hildesheimer in Berlin in 1873 became the foremost institution in German-speaking lands training rabbis confident in their Jewish and secular learning. Students were educated simultaneously at the Hildesheimer Seminary and at a secular university, often completing their studies with a doctorate. Popular choices of secular subjects were oriental languages and archaeology or philosophy. The Daiches' brothers – Salis' older brother Samuel also enrolled in the Hildesheimer Seminary – each chose to major in one of these fields of study. And while Salis chose the path of the congregational rabbi, Samuel enjoyed a long career teaching at Jews' College in London, publishing on Babylonian Jewish history and literature.²⁰ The *Doktorrabbiner*, combining secular with religious education, was 'someone capable of disseminating Orthodoxy and defending it in a challenging world'.²¹ The majority of graduates of the Hildesheimer 'received a German diploma which authorized the bearer to serve as a rabbi and religious teacher',²² but not full rabbinic ordination. Hence a *Rabbiner* was not automatically someone who could render *halakhic* decisions, an important qualification as is apparent when studying the religious leadership of Jews in Britain and the education of Jewish clergy in the United Kingdom.

London's Jews' College, founded in 1855 by Chief Rabbi Nathan Adler, sought to improve

the standard of religious education of the leadership of Anglo-Jewry. Like the Chief Rabbinate itself, Jews' College was a centralising institution with its focus on the United Synagogue. 'Adlerism' extended its force across the Jewish congregations of the United Kingdom through the creation of 'a strong, centralized rabbinical establishment, with supreme authority over the public religious and educational life of the community ... to preserve traditional Judaism'.²³ From 1847 Adler's *Laws and Regulations for All the Ashkenazi Synagogues in the United Kingdom* purported to determine the organization, liturgy and education of all orthodox Jewish congregations across the UK. This move, according to Endelman, was akin to 'an authoritarian episcopal system that swept away congregational autonomy and rabbinical independence'.²⁴

In this context Jews' College functioned to educate future leaders of the religious Jewish communities with a strong emphasis on the pastoral side of leadership and the ability to preach a good sermon. Jews' College did not offer rabbinical ordination in the traditional sense, and its graduates were not learned in *halakhic* decision-making. Those who graduated from Jews' College in the majority had the status of 'minister' or 'reverend' who had to defer in *halakhic* questions to the authority of the Chief Rabbi and the London *Beth Din*: 'Anglo-Jewish ministers were not ordained rabbis but rather well-mannered, sweet-voiced clergymen who preached and led services'.²⁵ The majority of candidates who were serious about their studies went to Central and Eastern Europe to be educated and to achieve rabbinical ordination, even the Chief Rabbi's son, Hermann Adler. Jews' College was not able to attract large-scale enrolment of students at school and college level. Candidates for the ministry were neither attracted by the curriculum nor the social standing conferred by the status of 'minister', which ranked alongside lower-middle-class professionals on a mediocre salary.²⁶ The situation had not changed at the turn of the twentieth century and the conflicting needs of the established and immigrant communities were cause for a great deal of religious turmoil in the years leading up to World War I.

When recently-graduated Dr Daiches set sail for England in 1903, he left the Hildesheimer seminary with the qualification obtained by the majority of its graduates, a licence to preach and to occupy the position of minister.²⁷ This allowed him to apply for positions in the UK where the majority of Jewish clergy were not ordained rabbis and were often insufficiently educated in *halakhah*. Almost as soon as he arrived, Salis began to lecture in synagogues and Jewish institutions and to publish short articles in the Jewish press. However, in addition to

his training at the Hildesheimer and his solid secular education, he had also been educated in the traditional manner by his father, and in 1905, Salis Daiches was fully ordained as a rabbi by Rabbi Solomon Cohen, then Chief Rabbi of Vilna; three further ordinations followed, from Rabbi Ezekiel Lipshitz, Chief Rabbi of Kalish, his father Rabbi Israel Haim Daiches,²⁸ and the Rabbinical Seminary of Berlin, the latter interestingly only in 1912, nine years after graduating and leaving for the UK.²⁹ This impressive line-up of rabbinical endorsement placed Salis Daiches in the unique position of bridging both worlds and being equally conversant in the traditional religious, modern orthodox and secular environments. In all his correspondence and public statements, Daiches insisted on the title ‘rabbi’, that is, someone who has the authority to make *halakhic* rulings, in contrast to his ministerial colleagues who had to defer to a *Beth Din* or a qualified rabbi.

A significant question, which this article can only begin to explore, concerns Salis Daiches’ relationship to the Anglo-Jewish religious establishment. He was clearly ‘overqualified’ for the job specification of a minister in the United Synagogue and its satellite congregations.³⁰ By investigating some of the religious policies of Chief Rabbis Hermann Adler and his successor Joseph Hertz, we may be able to understand better how the United Synagogue leadership related to Daiches, how Daiches may have furthered his ambitions by moving to Edinburgh, and how the Chief Rabbi may have found a helpful way to ensure Daiches did not exercise too much influence in the United Synagogue.

Ben Elton has developed a typology to capture religious Jewish responses to modernity which is useful for the following analysis.³¹ Ranging from antipathy, rejecting modernity as a threat to authentic Judaism, to acceptance, in which modern secular society replaces Judaism, at the extreme ends,³² the majority of responses congregates around the ‘acknowledgement’ and ‘adaptation’ schools. The acknowledgement school recognises positive aspects of modernity, but seeks to retain the essentials of Jewish tradition. The adaptation school works to adapt Judaism to the insights generated by the modern age. Elton’s typology is helpful for this article, because it can usefully be mapped onto Daiches’ self-presentation in the public religious-political sphere and thus be used to begin to tease out his religious ideology.

Both Hermann Adler and Joseph Hertz, the two Chief Rabbis during whose tenure Salis Daiches was employed as congregational minister and then rabbi, can be placed on the traditionalist spectrum of the acknowledgement school.³³ Elton argues that Adler saw no

alternative to ‘acknowledging the modern world and accepting its best aspects’.³⁴ He supported the new scholarly methods of the *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, that is the scientific historical study of Jewish sources, tradition and history, as long as it did not touch the Pentateuch as the directly revealed word of God itself. The concept of *Torah im derekh erets*, that is orthodox Jewish practice while positively relating to the social and cultural setting of non-Jewish majority society, was a guideline for him. Adler, then, remained closest to the ideals of Esriel Hildesheimer and his seminary. Hertz can be placed in the same school as Adler, but he was more radical in his enthusiasm for *Wissenschaft*, though, like Adler, he would not cross the line on the Pentateuch, remaining fully committed to a traditionalist interpretation of *torah min hashamayim* (the divine revelation of the entire text of the Torah).³⁵ However, trained at the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York he also supported the progressive nature of *halakhah*, namely that, resting on immutable principles, Jewish law adapts to changing circumstances and responds creatively to new challenges.³⁶ This would align Hertz more closely with Zacharias Frankel and the seminary in Breslau which was more permissive in its application of *Wissenschaft* to post-biblical *halakhah* and sought greater appreciation of the modern secular world. However, Elton argues that

[Hertz’s] method of expressing his traditional beliefs – by using modern arguments, whether drawn from archaeology, sociology or cosmology – represents the continuation of an approach began by Adler, Hildesheimer and Hirsch to ensure continued support for tradition in the context of modernity, after the disappearance of unquestioned rabbinic authority.³⁷

While there are significant differences between Hildesheimer and Adler, and between Hildesheimer and Hirsch, in their articulation of the relationship of *halakhah* and secular *Wissenschaft*, Elton’s broad characterisation allows the recognition of a consonance in purpose and approach between Hertz and Daiches.

Salis Daiches’ education, which combined a rigorous curriculum in Jewish law and history with a doctorate earned in a secular university, qualifications lacking in many who held the position of minister in British synagogues, aligned well with Hermann Adler’s position, but even more so with that of his successor, Joseph Hertz. According to David Daiches, Salis transformed quickly into a perfect English gentleman in his speech and manners.³⁸ Having already mastered German as a foreign language to native-speaker standard and gained the

highest academic qualifications, he was able to do the same with English. The way to Scotland, recollects his son David, was paved by Salis' early engagement with the philosophy of David Hume.³⁹ Daiches clearly was in favour of 'anglicisation' while keeping with the acknowledgement school's primacy of *halakhah* as essential to maintaining Jewish life. He therefore championed the use of English over Yiddish, just as he had promoted the use of German over Yiddish,⁴⁰ and, as will become apparent, sought to support a synthesis of modernity with traditional Jewish practice. Regarding his work in Scotland, David Daiches identifies the following aim at the heart of his father's efforts:

Indeed, one of my father's great aims in life was to bring the two worlds – the Scottish and the Jewish – into intimate association, to demonstrate, by his way of life and that of his community, that orthodox Jewish communities could thrive in Scotland, true to their own traditions yet at the same time a respected part of the Scottish social and cultural scene.⁴¹

To achieve this, Daiches embarked on a programme of preaching, teaching and publication, practically demonstrating himself to the Jewish and non-Jewish world the synthesis he promoted, akin to that proposed and exemplified by Chief Rabbi Hertz.

While Daiches' training and ideology made him useful to the Anglo-Jewish religious leadership, he may also have been perceived as a rival. His insistence on his rabbinical title and the desire to act as a *halakhic* decision-maker could have set him on a course of confrontation with the Chief Rabbi and his *Beth Din*. The twenty-three-year-old Daiches' rise to relative prominence in the Jewish community's leadership within the first decade of his arrival testifies to his ambition and industry. Aside from the desire to join his family,⁴² it seems reasonable to suppose that Salis Daiches chose to emigrate to the UK on account of the perceived greater professional opportunities open to him here, compared to Germany or his native Russia. Unlike his older brother Samuel who became lecturer at Jews' College, thus employed under the auspices of the Chief Rabbi and his *Beth Din*, Salis strove for community leadership.⁴³ As such, he could either become a challenge to the United Synagogue establishment or be placed in its service to manifest or expand the authority of the London *Beth Din* in the provinces.

Daiches' appointment in Edinburgh as 'Minister and Headmaster of the Hebrew Classes' in

1919 for the modest salary of £350p.a. established him as the major *halakhically* qualified rabbi in Scotland supported by the London *Beth Din*.⁴⁴ Daiches' correspondence with congregations wishing to appoint him as their rabbi in Shanghai, Johannesburg and Pretoria in the 1920s testifies to his confidence that his qualifications would place him in the lead in any restructuring of the rabbinate in the UK. For example, he resisted the tempting offer of the Pretoria congregation which would not only have almost tripled his salary, but which would also have offered removal expenses and a 'get out clause', allowing him to quit his position after one year should he dislike the South African climate and return to Britain, all expenses paid.⁴⁵ Rather, Daiches hoped for an appointment as regional or district rabbi, a concept promoted by some to the London *Beth Din* in the first decade of the twentieth century in an effort to unify the religious education of Jewish clergy and to heighten the *halakhic* competence of ministers by providing direct guidance and leadership in the provinces.⁴⁶ In his contributions to Glasgow's *Jewish Echo* in 1928, Daiches argued forcefully for 'The Need for the Religious Re-organisation of Scottish Jewry' in the wake of the recent expansion of the Jewish communities in Scotland because of immigration.⁴⁷ He suggested that, in particular in questions of *kashrut*, marriage, divorce, conversion, religious education and regulation of religious leadership, regional *halakhic* guidance was essential, the London *Beth Din* simply being too far away to interact successfully with local concerns. These three articles in June and July 1928 revive the notion of a 'district Rabbinate' which had been muted in the lead-up to World War I, and propose the establishment of a Scottish *Beth Din*. However, such proposals were never implemented and Daiches remained rabbi to the Edinburgh Hebrew Congregation, struggling to make ends meet on a modest, frozen, salary which he clearly saw as unfit for someone of his education and standing.⁴⁸ Yet, the notion of future elevation to a supervisory position and regional *halakhic* authority bestowed by the London *Beth Din*, as well as his attachment to Scotland and the city of Edinburgh in particular, kept him where he was.⁴⁹ Salis Daiches died in 1945, days before the end of World War II.

Ideology

Daiches was a prolific writer who frequently expressed his opinion on political and social issues of the day in print, mostly in newspapers, through letters to the editor and interviews. His real gift, as reported by his son David Daiches, was oratory.⁵⁰ He certainly outlined or even wrote out his sermons, but eye-witness testimony suggests that his delivery of sermons, speeches and papers was most impressive, a dimension that cannot be conveyed through the

written word alone. Sadly, no audio recordings of Daiches appear to have been made or have survived. However, reports of his speeches and sermons were frequently found in the local Scottish press (*The Scotsman*) and the Jewish papers (*JC*, *The Jewish Echo*) and give a flavour of the passionate speaker he must have been. Daiches used the print media and his numerous speaking engagements to present Jewish history, teaching and practice favourably to the non-Jewish public. Even his addresses to primarily Jewish audiences, such as his weekly sermons, his presentations in the Masonic Lodges and the Edinburgh Jewish Literary Society, and the Jewish Student Society were often reported on and summarised in the local press. Thus Jewish affairs occupied a good deal of secular, mainstream newspaper column-space, commanding positive public attention. Daiches not only sought to present the public with a positive image of Judaism,⁵¹ he also intervened frequently in political debates, advocating for the concerns of religious and cultural minorities.⁵²

Daiches' interventions in political debates during his tenure in Edinburgh, such as his letters to newspapers opposing moves to ban *shechitah*, his involvement in discussions about religious education in Scotland following the 1918 Education Act, his championing of Zionism in the secular press, and combating of missionary activities, stem from his commitment to equal rights for all citizens.⁵³ These interventions also express his conviction that Judaism, properly understood by both Jew and gentile, can and should become a valued contributor to the political and social life of Scottish society.⁵⁴

Daiches' strategy of public engagement with Jews and non-Jews resonates with Chief Rabbi Joseph Hertz's approach. Ben Elton argues that Hertz used his sermons and publications to set out the religious agenda of his Chief Rabbinate to the congregations, thus seeking to educate about core Jewish values and practices.⁵⁵ Similarly, Daiches used the press to portray Jews and Judaism to a largely non-Jewish audience, and his weekly sermons, in the beginning of his tenure in Edinburgh preached in two if not three locations, were key to his 'project' to educate the Jewish community. Addressed in the language of the community, English for the Edinburgh Hebrew Congregation in Graham Street and Yiddish for the worshippers in its other *shul* in Roxburgh Place,⁵⁶ Daiches worked from a verse of the week's *parashah* and its context in Jewish history and tradition to the message he wanted to convey to his audience. This was sometimes a point of Jewish doctrine, but was just as likely to have related to relations with the non-Jewish population, to Zionism, or to defence against Christian missionaries.⁵⁷ Daiches' approach to sermons place him into a new and modern strategy of

exposition developed during the nineteenth century which perceived the sermon as a major educational tool, designed to influence the religious, social and political outlook of the communities. Marc Saperstein explains that such sermons

begin with a biblical verse, called by the preacher his 'text', though the verse is not necessarily from the Torah lesson of the week. ... The preacher may spend some time discussing the original context of the verse before applying it to the main issue he wants to address. ... Absent from the mainstream sermons, however, is the preoccupation of medieval and early modern preachers with exegetical problems: Where homiletical exegesis had been the centre of gravity for the earlier preachers, now the biblical verse becomes a springboard catapulting the preacher into the central logic of his own address.⁵⁸

A key concern throughout Daiches' engagement with Jewish and non-Jewish audiences, in sermons, speeches and publications, is what he perceives as the compatibility or even coincidence of Jewish with secular philosophical and political thought. The 1928 collection of essays *Aspects of Judaism* can be understood as a summary of Daiches' position of the relationship between Judaism and secular philosophy, in a sense his religious-political manifesto. Daiches had planned further volumes of essays, but these did not come to fruition. *Aspects of Judaism*, however, appears to have been so popular that one Scottish newspaper portrait of Rabbi Daiches claimed that it 'is known in practically every Jewish household'.⁵⁹

Daiches opens *Aspects of Judaism* with the following declaration

English-speaking Jews ought to be ready to support wholeheartedly any contribution to Anglo-Jewish literature that is likely to deepen the Jew's loyalty to his faith and his regard for his people. The fair-minded Gentile reader is sure to welcome any opportunity that may be given him of gaining first-hand information on Jewish teaching and practice, and of widening his outlook in regard to the position which Jewish religious thought occupies in the world's spiritual advancement.⁶⁰

Addressed to Jews and non-Jews alike, though aware that these two reader groups were likely to approach the book with very different presuppositions, Daiches set out to define Judaism in relation to philosophy, explain Kant's philosophy through the superiority of *halakhah*, defend

a biblically based Jewish interpretation of history, and champion Judaism as a religion of freedom guaranteed by *halakhah* (Jewish law). Daiches' strategy throughout the essays is twofold. As an orthodox rabbi he was bound by the sanctity of the revelation of the Torah, its supreme authority and its perfection. While Daiches reiterated this principle fundamental to his self-understanding and belief, he also used it as a starting point from which to explain the prefiguration of all rational philosophical thought within the divine revelation of the Torah itself.⁶¹ David Daiches recollects that his father's aim was 'to fit Jewish orthodoxy into a scheme of rational humane ethics.'⁶²

For example, in the essay 'Kant and Judaism', Daiches sets out to explain the complete compatibility of Kant's philosophy with orthodox Jewish thought and practice.⁶³ He opens by acknowledging that Kant had an ambivalent if not outrightly hostile attitude towards Jews and Judaism. Daiches is ready to excuse this as a product of ignorance:

Kant's inability to understand and appreciate the tenets of Judaism has never prevented Jews from understanding and appreciating the philosophy of Kant, and to-day it is admitted by those who combine in themselves a thorough knowledge of Jewish teachings with a full appreciation of Kant's philosophical theories that there is no religious system which is so compatible with that of the philosopher's epistemology as well as with his ethical doctrines and postulates as the system embodied in Judaism.⁶⁴

Daiches concludes that it was only Kant's ignorance of Jewish teaching and thought that led to his anti-Jewish stance:

Had he known where to look for it Kant would, indeed, have found that his ethical theories, so far as they are practical and are applicable to human nature as it is, have been anticipated by the Rabbis, just as his epistemological doctrines have been foreseen – if only dimly and vaguely – by the Jewish thinkers of the Middle Ages.⁶⁵

Consequently, Daiches finds that

the absoluteness and binding force of the moral law, termed by Kant 'the Categorical Imperative', finds nowhere a more eloquent expression, and is given nowhere a more

prominent position, than in the Torah – as understood and interpreted by its Jewish exponents of all ages.⁶⁶

While Kant would have objected to claims that ethical principles originate with God, Daiches transforms this criticism into an explanation of the advantages Judaism derives from the attribution of ethical law to the divine:

The plea that submission to external authority deprives man of his moral freedom and his actions of their ethical value ... has been indirectly refuted by the Jewish religious philosophers, who have identified moral freedom with readiness to obey the Divine Law – even when it is contrary to one's own physical impulses and desires – and discovered the ethical value of an action in the approval which religious teaching gives to that action. This does not mean, however, that Judaism denies the existence of an absolute moral law as a principle which is good in itself and therefore *ought* to be binding for the ideal man, irrespective of the fact that it is part of the teaching of the Torah.⁶⁷

This strategy of argument places Daiches firmly in the tradition of orthodox *Wissenschaft des Judentums*. In order to enable orthodox scholars to engage in *Wissenschaft*-related research, traditional approaches to the Torah needed to be squared with the principles of the scientific study of history. One way to accomplish that was to argue that all research rests on presuppositions held by the scholar and hence orthodox scholars could participate in the scientific community by stating these clearly and exposing such presuppositions in others.⁶⁸ Although Daiches did not work in fields where such justification was needed, he effectively adapted the stance he was familiar with from his studies at the *Rabbiner-Seminar* to his philosophical writing and his politics in the UK. In a sense, Daiches modelled the position of modern orthodoxy, the combination of traditional learning with secular, scientific knowledge – *Torah u'maddah* – existing not only side by side, but intertwined in perfect harmony. This, in his view, placed him in a position to perceive the vital contribution to be made by observant Jews to contemporary society.

Chief Rabbi Hertz reflected a similar approach in his publications addressed to Jews and non-Jews alike. *A book of Jewish thoughts* 'was to reveal to Jews and non-Jews the "imperishable wealth of the Jewish heritage" and to increase respect for Judaism ... This reflected the two

sides of his role in the context of a modern community, maintaining allegiance to Judaism through persuasion and promoting Jews' good name before a non-Jewish audience'.⁶⁹

Daiches' leadership of Scottish Jewry made a welcome contribution to Hertz's Chief Rabbinate and the wider leadership of the United Synagogue. Hertz did well to commit Salis Daiches, an erudite and excellent orator who deliberately anglicised, but remained fully within the bounds of *halakhah*, to the northernmost region of the UK. He offered Daiches a significant sphere of influence and leadership – including *halakhic* decision-making, and by doing so he also ensured that Daiches would not be a threat to his own leadership. Hertz and Daiches worked well together, there is ample evidence of religious agreement in their exchanges of letters.⁷⁰ Daiches sought Hertz's opinion on his own professional ambitions and appears to have been content to submit to the authority of the Chief Rabbi, particularly as Hertz's ideology and religious policy closely matched his own.⁷¹

Conclusion: A Scottish Rabbi?

Daiches' qualifications and skills as an orator accorded him an exceptional position amongst his British peers. Combining the learning of an Eastern European *rav* with the scientific study of Judaism in an orthodox key, this graduate of the Hildesheimer seminary was more than a modern *Rabbiner*. He thrived on the British tradition of freedom of religion and speech, and successfully used the opportunities opening up in the British Jewish community. A comparable career in Germany may not have been open to him. Orthodoxy was a much more contested field in Germany where the boundaries with the large and established Reform communities were argued for very sharply. Like his father, Daiches was a lenient-ruling rabbi whose *halakhic* practice, though not his reasoning, appears closer to today's Conservative approach. Combine this with his huge leadership aspirations, and Daiches would likely have faced much conflict with the German Orthodox leadership.

Furthermore, rabbis in Germany were meant to espouse political neutrality as a key virtue.⁷²

Daiches' desire for complete equality of minorities with the resident majority, expressed in his frequent interventions in political debates, may have been a cause for concern for German Jewish communities and thus significantly curtailed his leadership ambitions.

But was he a *Scottish* rabbi? Reading David Daiches' reminiscences of his father, the Salis Daiches portrayed identified as a Jewish Scot-by-choice, not least because of his ongoing

engagement with the philosophy of David Hume and the Scottish Enlightenment. He certainly made Scotland his home of choice for the longest continuous period of his career and apparently did not see any other location as a suitable venue for his talents, even though a move may have improved his family's finances considerably. Hence in the sense of dedicating his life's work to the maintenance, development and education of the Jewish communities of Scotland, he can be seen as a *Scottish* rabbi.

¹ Mark Gilfillan's PhD thesis (*Jews in Edinburgh: 1880-1950*, University of Ulster 2012), soon to be published as a monograph, on the history of the Jewish community in Edinburgh is a welcome recent contribution to Scottish-Jewish history, joining the work of Kenneth Collins ([1990] *Second City Jewry: The Jews of Glasgow in the Age of Expansion, 1790-1919*, Scottish Jewish Archives Centre, Glasgow), Ben Braber ([2007] *Jews in Glasgow: Immigration and Integration 1879-1939*, Vallentine Mitchell, London) and Linda Fleming ([2005] *Jewish Women in Glasgow c1880-1950: Gender, Ethnicity and the Immigrant Experience*, unpubl. PhD thesis, University of Glasgow) on the Jewish communities of Glasgow. Similarly, Nathan Abrams 2009, *Caledonian Jews: A Study of Six Small Jewish Communities*, McFarland, London, made a first attempt at understanding the development of Jewish settlement and community formation across Scotland since the late 19th century. This article is very much a pilot to a larger research project on Jewish religious and cultural life in Scotland (AHRC funded research project *Jewish Lives, Scottish Spaces: Jewish Migration to Scotland 1880-1950*, [2015-2018], PI Dr H. Holtschneider, University of Edinburgh, Co-I Dr Mia Spiro, University of Glasgow).

² 'Anglo-Jewish' and its derivatives including 'British-Jewish', as others have pointed out, is a problematic term, in the current literature mainly excluding research on Jews on the 'Celtic Fringe' in Scotland, Wales and Ireland, while purporting that studies of English Jewry offer relevant insights about these other, under-researched population groups (for example Abrams 2009, 7). This article will prefer 'British-Jewish' and its variants to emphasise the geographical extent of research on Jewish history in the British Isles and use regionally specific terminology such as 'Scottish-Jewish' or 'English-Jewish' in the appropriate contexts.

³ Endelman, Todd M. 2002, *The Jews of Britain 1656-2000*, Jewish Communities in the Modern World 3, University of California Press, Berkeley, 130.

⁴ Kushner, Tony 2009, *Anglo-Jewry since 1066: Place, Memory and Locality*, Manchester University Press.

⁵ See, for example, Endelman 2011, *Broadening Jewish History: Towards a Social History of Ordinary Jews*, Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, Oxford.

⁶ Norman Cohen's 1964, 'Trends in Anglo-Jewish Religious Life' in Gould, Julius / Esh, Shaul eds, *Jewish Life in Modern Britain*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London 41-66, and John Shaftesley's 1973, 'Religious Controversies', in Levin, Salmond S. ed., *A Century of Anglo-Jewish Life, 1870-1970: Lectures to Commemorate the Centenary of the United Synagogue*, United Synagogue, London, 93-113 notwithstanding. Even Kushner, Tony/Ewence, Hannah 2010, 'Whatever Happened to British Jewish Studies? In Search of Contexts', *Jewish Culture and History* 12:1-2, 1-26 and the articles assembled in the concurrent book version of the journal do not include a study dedicated to the religious history of Jews in 20th century

Britain. The situation is somewhat different with regard to the history of Jews in Britain from readmission to Victorian times (see Gartner, Lloyd P. 1986, 'A Quarter Century of Anglo-Jewish Historiography', *Jewish Social Studies* 48:2, 105-126).

⁷ Such as Freud-Kandel, Miri 2006, *Orthodox Judaism in Britain since 1913: An ideology forsaken*, Vallentine Mitchell, London, and Elton, Benjamin J. 2009, *Britain's Chief Rabbis and the religious character of Anglo-Jewry, 1880-1970*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, on Chief Rabbis since Nathan Adler, and Maria Haralambakis' ongoing research on Moses Gaster <http://www.manchesterjewishstudies.org/moses-gaster-project/> (last accessed 25.1.2015) funded by the British Academy.

⁸ Daiches, Salis 1928, *Aspects of Judaism*, Routledge, London. See also Daiches, David 1955, 'My father, and his father', *Commentary* 20, 522-533.

⁹ Daiches, David 1997, *Two Worlds*, Canongate Books, Edinburgh. Archival sources relevant to other aspects of an intellectual portrait of Rabbi Dr Salis Daiches are his sermon manuscripts and notes for further essays, the breadth of his contribution to the Jewish and non-Jewish press, his educational publications for Jewish children, further private correspondence held at the Hartley Library in Southampton, and his correspondence with Chief Rabbi Joseph Hertz, as well as papers in the family's possession.

¹⁰ This article focuses on Daiches' career development and religious ideology, concentrating on the articulation of a synthesis of traditional Jewish life and values with secular philosophy and full participation in a multi-religious society. Significant aspects of Daiches' engagement in local Edinburgh and wider Scottish inter-faith activities, his wide-ranging and important contribution to the Scottish and British Zionist movement, his local activism on behalf of Jewish education, the religious curriculum in state schools, and his work with Jewish refugees from Nazi Germany and Nazi-occupied Europe have been addressed by Mark Gilfillan (2012).

¹¹ Daiches 1997, 57.

¹² Daiches 1997, 42, 98, 155f.

¹³ In particular in 'Promised Lands', David Daiches contrasts stereotypical imagery of the 'backwardness' of the *shtetl* with his father's enlightened ideology of a synthesis of orthodox and secular culture, the former characterised by 'darkness', problematic 'odours' or stuffiness, and 'shabbiness', the latter described as light, airy and clean. The status of *Two Worlds* in the popular imagination of early twentieth century Jewish life in Edinburgh and its relationship to the surviving historical record of the Jewish community in the city is a worthwhile research project waiting to be attempted.

¹⁴ 'Orthodox' refers to the branch of Jewish religious practice and ideology which gives primacy to *halakhah* over other principles governing behaviour. At its most liberal or modern end, orthodoxy seeks to reconcile religious (Torah) knowledge with secular knowledge while affirming the revealed truth of the Torah.

¹⁵ Daiches 1997, 162.

¹⁶ Israel Haim Daiches, Salis Daiches' father, a reknown expert on the Jerusalem Talmud, was rabbi at Beth Hamedrash Hagadol in Leeds.

¹⁷ Endelman 2002, 176ff.; Alderman, Geoffrey 1998, *Modern British Jewry*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 142ff.

¹⁸ Daiches 1997, 174, 176f.

¹⁹ Wilke, Carsten 2013, 'Modern Rabbinical Training: Intercultural Invention and Political Reconfiguration', in *Rabbi - Pastor - Priest: Their Roles and Profiles Through the Ages*, eds Walter Homolka & Heinz-Günther Schöttler, Studia Judaica 64, DeGruyter, Berlin, 86ff.

²⁰ Salis succeeded Samuel in his position in Sunderland, serving the same congregation from 1908-1918, largely composed of immigrants from Lithuania.

²¹ Ellenson, David 1990, *Rabbi Esriel Hildesheimer and the Creation of a Modern Jewish Orthodoxy*, Judaic Studies Series, The University of Alabama Press, Tuscaloosa, 159.

²² Ellenson 1990, 159.

²³ Endelman 2002, 115.

²⁴ Endelman 2002, 115f.

²⁵ Endelman 2002, 119.

²⁶ Alderman 1998, 93; Newman 1976, *The United Synagogue 1870-1970*, Routledge & KeganPaul, London, 87.

²⁷ Ellenson 1990, 159.

²⁸ *The Jewish World*, August 14, 1908, 18 (Acc. 12278/25, National Library of Scotland, Papers of Salis Daiches and family, Acc. 122778). This series of ordinations also recognizes his mastery of the traditional *yeshiva* curriculum which, with regard to *halakhic* competence, went far beyond that offered at the Hildesheimer seminary, and thus established Daiches' credentials with the immigrant community.

²⁹ Eliav, Mordechai / Hildesheimer, Esriel / Schütz, Chana / Simon, Hermann eds 2008, *Das Berliner Rabbinerseminar 1873-1938: Seine Gründungsgeschichte - seine Studenten*, Schriftenreihe des Centrum Judaicum 5, Henrich & Henrich, Berlin, 97. Why Daiches decided to seek this ordination in 1912 when he was already established in the United Kingdom is unclear.

³⁰ Already in 1904 Moses Gaster wrote to congratulate Daiches on his 'Candidatur' (which most likely is his taking a short term position in Hammersmith or Hull) with the following endorsement: 'Leute Ihrer Bildung und von Ihrer academischen Schulung sind nicht zu haeufig in England anzutreffen und gewiss nicht unter Candidaten fuer die Stellung eines "Minister"; umso groesser muss die Befriedigung sein, dass endlich auch eine andere Schule anfaengt hier Fuss zu fassen. Ich bin fest überzeugt dass, so sehr man Ihnen zu diesem Erfolg Glueck wuenschen darf, die Gemeinde, welche Sie anstellt, sich auch dazu gratulieren muss.' (Acc. 12278/1)

³¹ For the following cf. Elton 2009, 40ff.

³² Though the acceptance and embrace of modernity need not imply the replacement of Judaism.

³³ Elton 2009, 71ff., 164ff.

³⁴ Elton 2009, 99.

³⁵ Elton 2009, 189f.

³⁶ Elton 2009, 190.

³⁷ Elton 2009, 192.

³⁸ Daiches 1997, 162.

³⁹ Daiches 1997, 78, 88, 162, 168.

⁴⁰ Daiches 1997, 88.

⁴¹ Daiches, 1997, 9.

⁴² His father, Rabbi Israel Haim Daiches at Beth Hamedrash Hagadol in Leeds had founded the Union of Orthodox Rabbis of England and was known as being favourably disposed to technological advances and having a tendency to lenient *halakhic* rulings. How he was perceived and treated by the United Synagogue is an important question for the wider research project.

⁴³ The career path of Salis' brother Samuel may also be significant. Equally qualified, Samuel associated with Jews' College following his position in Sunderland. Did the Chief Rabbi wish to keep his contribution to the United Synagogue scholarly and close to the heart of power? Did the Anglo-Jewish establishment perceive the Daiches family as a potential threat to its power?

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- ⁴⁴ Letter from A. Phillips to S. Daiches 11.12.1918 (Acc. 12278/1).
- ⁴⁵ Correspondence with Pretoria congregation 1929-1922 (Acc. 12278/2).
- ⁴⁶ For example Daiches' contributions to *The Sentinel* Chicago 18 March 1911 (18 Acc. 12278/25). See also Samuel Daiches' sermon, delivered 16 February 1907 at the Sunderland Synagogue, entitled 'Judaism in England, Congregation and Minister' which argues forcefully for the institution of local decision-making bodies and local authoritative leadership: 'A man cannot sit in London and rule Judaism in Manchester or Edinburgh. Every Jewish community must have its own independent religious guide. (5)' Salis Daiches also attended the conferences of Anglo-Jewish ministers in 1909, 1911, 1925 and 1929 at which the organisation of religious communities in the provinces, including District Batei Din, was debated (Acc. 2805/01/03/01/01, London Metropolitan Archives). He was part of the Standing Committee representing provincial congregations and also, in 1911, part of a Sub-Committee working on the 'District Organisation of Provincial Congregations' (Acc. 2805/01/03/02/02).
- ⁴⁷ *Jewish Echo* Glasgow 29 June, 6 & 13 July 1928. Mark Gilfillan argues similarly: 'It should be stated that Rabbi Daiches had, for several years, been urging the Chief Rabbi in London to create "District Rabbinate" throughout Britain and the Empire, a move which would see him formally acknowledged as Chief Rabbi of Scotland. As early as July 1919, a movement had begun in Glasgow to support the creation of a District Rabbinate for Scotland. ... Hertz believed that the Jewish community was not "ripe for it," and that any move in that direction would be slow, requiring at least "a Rabbinate Conference and 18 months of intensive differences of opinion." See letter from Chief Rabbi J.H. Hertz to Rabbi Daiches dated 21 July 1919, PSD. Enthusiasm for the idea, as featured in the JC, remained high for a few years before fading into obscurity' (Gilfillan 2012, 338).
- ⁴⁸ Letter from A. Phillips to S. Daiches 25.12.1925 (Acc. 12278/2).
- ⁴⁹ Correspondence of S. Daiches with Chief Rabbi Joseph Hertz (Acc. 12278/2).
- ⁵⁰ Daiches 1997, 155f.
- ⁵¹ Daiches 1997, 98.
- ⁵² Professor Macdonald Webster was exasperated by Daiches' frequent press contributions and complained that, "more and more it is being said that no one in Scotland today can say 'Jew,' but Rabbi Daiches must needs rush into print." Levison, Frederick 1989, *Christian and Jew: The life of Leon Levison, 1881-1936*, Pentland Press, Edinburgh, 149.
- ⁵³ Gilfillan 2012, 238ff.
- ⁵⁴ Daiches 1997, 34, 102, 168, 175.
- ⁵⁵ Elton 2009, 205.
- ⁵⁶ Daiches was hired to minister to a united community and had even made the unification of the community a condition of his appointment. However, this unity was a tenuous arrangement and for a number of years the established anglicised, and immigrant traditionalist, parishioners maintained separate *shuls*. See also Gilfillan 2012, 213; Daiches 1997, 101, 124 speaks of his father attending to the needs of older members of the congregation and Yiddish-speaking immigrants asking *halachic* questions pertaining to daily life.
- ⁵⁷ See also Saperstein, Marc 2008, *Jewish Preaching in Times of War 1800-2001*, Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, Oxford, 32f.
- ⁵⁸ Saperstein 2008, 2f.
- ⁵⁹ *The Baillie* 179, 17.8.1935 (Scottish Jewish Archives Centre, Glasgow).
- ⁶⁰ Daiches 1928, xii.
- ⁶¹ Daiches 1997, 103, 183.
- ⁶² Daiches 1997, 171.

⁶³ David Daiches suggests that Kant and Hume were the two secular philosophers most relevant to his father's synthesis (Daiches 1997, 89f., 168).

⁶⁴ Daiches 1928, 55.

⁶⁵ Daiches 1928, 61.

⁶⁶ Daiches 1928, 56.

⁶⁷ Daiches 1928, 57.

⁶⁸ Yedidya, Asaf 2011, 'Orthodox Strategies in the research of the *Wissenschaft des Judentums*', *European Journal of Jewish Studies* 5:1, 74; see also Solomon, Norman 2012, *Torah from Heaven: The Reconstruction of Jewish Faith*, Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, Oxford, particularly 204f. when discussing David Zvi Hoffmann's (1843-1921) approach to the biblical text. Hoffmann had been one of Daiches' teachers at the Hildesheimer Seminary.

⁶⁹ Elton 2009, 209.

⁷⁰ For example a letter exchange 6-10 May 1925 concerning the authorization of a marriage between a Jewish woman and a gentile convert which demonstrates that conversions are not carried out with the knowledge and consent of London Beth Din. Daiches agrees with the disapproval of the Chief Rabbi and with the need for proper oversight of *halakhic* issues. Daiches thus enforces locally the London Beth Din's standards while also pointing again to the need for 'an officially recognised Beth Din for Scotland' (Acc. 2805/04/02/040). The issue of a local Beth Din as a guarantor of *halakhic* standards in Scotland repeatedly makes its appearance in correspondence between Daiches and Hertz' (see also n71).

⁷¹ For example, Daiches seeks advice from Hertz about the call by the congregation in Cape Town in 1919. He rejects the offer of a position in 'the Colonies', because of what he sees as the greater chances of gaining 'a position of importance in the community' through the establishment of a District Rabbinate and a United Synagogue in Scotland (letter from Salis Daiches to Chief Rabbi Hertz 31 July 1919, Acc. 2805/04/02/041). There is more correspondence on this issue in September and December 1919 and into February 1920. These letters are between the Chief Rabbi and Salis Daiches, and the Chief Rabbi and Abel Phillips, Honorary Secretary of the Edinburgh Hebrew Congregation. The Chief Rabbi stalls negotiations and does not take the initiative to establish a United Synagogue in Scotland or a District Rabbinate, whereas the Edinburgh congregation and Daiches press for one with Daiches as District Rabbi, quoting the fragmentation of the Glasgow communities as a reason for strong, centralized leadership. However, no action is taken without the Chief Rabbi's initiative or at least endorsement and thus the issue appears to have been shelved following the Hertz' negative letter from 22 February 1920 (Acc. 2805/04/02/041).

⁷² Altmann, Alexander 1974, 'The German Rabbi: 1910-1939', *Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook* 19:1, 43.